



8-29-2007

Caines, Robert Jr.

Bronx African American History Project
Fordham University

Follow this and additional works at: https://research.library.fordham.edu/baahp_oralhist

 Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Caines, Robert Jr. August 29, 2007. Interview with the Bronx African American History Project. BAAHP Digital Archive at Fordham University.

This Interview is brought to you for free and open access by the Bronx African American History Project at Fordham Research Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Oral Histories by an authorized administrator of Fordham Research Commons. For more information, please contact considine@fordham.edu, bkilee@fordham.edu.

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

August 29, 2007

Transcriber: Ariana Allensworth

Oneka LaBennett (OL): Today is Wednesday August 29th 2007 and we are at Fordham University, the interviewers present are myself, Oneka LaBennett, and Dr. Mark Naison, and the interviewee is Robert Caines Jr. a.k.a. DJ Flawless. Robert is the son DJ Rockin' Rob a.k.a. Robert Caines Senior who is previously interviewed earlier this summer on July 21st. Robert is a DJ who works for Scratch DJ Academy and who grew up in the Mott Haven projects in the Bronx. So this interview is going to give us some background on the earlier interview we did with Robert's father and four other individuals. So first of all, tell me where you worked?

Robert Caines (RC): Well right now I'm unemployed, because I used to work for Scratch but I ended up going to do other things. So right now I'm not working.

OL: So, why don't we start off, we'll just do a little bit of background so that this will be a complete interview. Why don't you tell us where you grew up in the Bronx, your date of birth, and could you also spell you last name, we had some confusion over whether it was Gaines or Caines.

RC: It's Caines, C-A-I-N-E-S.

OL: Okay, so where did you grow up?

RC: I grew up in Mott Haven Projects. That's the same apartment as my pops, and my mother also lived there as well.

OL: And when were you born, what's your date of birth?

RC: January 23, 1983.

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

OL: And can you tell us a little bit about your home when you grew up, how many siblings you had, who was in the house, were your parents together?

RC: My parents wasn't together, I ended up living with mother and my nana,--

OL: Who was your mother's mother?

RC: - - Yes, sorry. It was just us three, you know, it was a big house. I'm the only child, so it was like I have a lot of cousins, so I was very much to myself as a child. I didn't really go outside that much, you know, played a lot of video games, listened to my pops' music tapes, and that's kind of like how I kind of moved myself into the whole music hip-hop world. Because that fact that my pops was around, but he wasn't around as much, so it's like, to me, that's how - -

Mark Naison (MN): Was he living in the Mott Haven Houses also?

RC: - -No, he moved to Gun Hill Road, and once that happened, you know, I didn't really see him that much, like I saw him mostly on the weekends. So, my way of getting to him was just sitting down and just listening to his music tapes. I used to have this little Casio little machine that had a little record player on it, so when I used to sit there and grab some of my mom's tapes, of my pops', I played it and it's like *I knew it*. Like I heard it so many times, and knew it so well, I used to sit there and try to play out what he was doing with my turntable. Like I had the volume, I'd cut the volume off and on, and I was probably like 8, 9 years old, so.

MN: Were your other musical influences in you other than your father?

RC: Oh yes, my mother, she used to also be a DJ and--

OL: Really? Really? What was your mom's real name and then her DJ name?

RC: Her name is Trudy Rashaw - -

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

OL: Oh, I heard you talking about her in the other interview.

RC: - - Yea. And her DJ name was DJ Trudy True. Like the whole – see they made a group called the New Rashaw Crew, and it was basically like our family, my Uncle Barry, my Uncle Tiny, my Aunt Hazel, you know, and like they all rhymed. And then on top of that I had my Uncle Moe, that's Keith, and he was also a DJ, my Uncle Tiney's also a DJ, my Uncle T-Bird is also a DJ, like our whole family dealt with music.

MN: Now in terms of – Who rhymed and who became DJs? How old were people when they decided well my talent isn't as an MC as opposed to my talent as a DJ?

RC: I think they didn't really put it as a label, I mean from what certain, some people, did the most, like my Uncle Tiny, he was like, I knew him as DJ and an MC, he MCed more than he DJed. And who else? Everyone, else you know, DJed and stuff like that or had their own split. My Uncle Tiny was like the main one that MCed and also DJed, so it was like, that's another person that did a lot for me, you know, because he was the one mostly around me. So when I used to sit there and listen to him rhyme or, you know, we're playing music in the house, and then he'll end up just making noises and rhyming the with songs, and making it all hyped and stuff, that's kind of like another thing that taught me how to really flow with music and understand it and also enjoy it.

MN: Now, what about other people in your neighborhood? Were there other people doing this, or was it mainly your family?

RC: Back then, there was, I think, there was some people that was doing it, but it was kind of like basically my family was the family that did it the most, that was mostly known for it. So it was like when they had certain parties and my nana's house, they

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

used to like pack that house up, like it would be literally almost like the whole neighborhood, trying to go up to my Nana's house because - -

MN: What was the apartment number?

RC: - - She still lives there, I don't want to just put it out there - -

MN: Okay, right.

RC: Well, let me - -

OL: No, that's fine.

RC: - - But, yea, it was right also in the same building, Mott Haven Projects, and like you would be able to hear the music because it's also by 3rd Avenue, 149th Street, and it's a good amount of blocks and you was able to be at 3rd Avenue and hear them all the way in the building. And it was like you'd hear echoes of the music and all that stuff. When I was younger, you know, when they had those certain parties and stuff, when I came in, they wouldn't let me go. So, it was like, if they had a party and I had to go to my father's mother's house, and I used to be just upset, and I'm like I want to be there, I got all my family there, and I play music, why can't I be there?

MN: So there's a whole sense of excitement surrounding this, that you felt, man I can do this, I'm going to be able to have everybody want to come to my party.

RC: Exactly. It was like for me, it was like, I saw a vibe there. I realized, people are having fun, so I'm like, I want to have fun too, I don't want to be sitting here and playing video games, because like ever since the beginning I always knew there was another side of every - like with every problem that you have, there's always another side of it. So it's like music was something for me, that if I had problems in school, or if I had problems with my parents, or anything like that, that was my way of like totally, almost

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

you could say, coming off this earth. If it was me playing music, or me listening to music, it made me not be here anymore. It put me in this thing of just creativity, my mind would just flow of different things I could do, if I listen to someone else, probably, DJing or even any song, automatically, in my head, I start daydreaming of me flipping the song around, or, I could do this to it, or hey, I really wish I had those two records because I could do this, this, this. So it was like it always gave me an adventure, when it came down to music.

OL: Okay, well I want to hear more about how you started scratching, and sort of emulating your dad, in a bit. But I also want to hear about when you said you were younger, and you listened to your dad's tapes, was there other music you were listening to at the same time? What was the recorded music that you were listening to?

RC: A variety of everything. Like, now I really thank my nana for that, because she played a lot of jazz, a lot of 50s music 60s music. Like, Frankie Lymon, is a prime example, so it's like, I was all around music. Even a lot of Spanish music on top of that, like back in the day we used to call it freestyle music, and my mom listened to that a lot, a lot of salsa music, a lot of meringue, so it was like, I was all around all different types of music. I even to the point, I even liked some country music, I liked to sit there and listen to them play a banjo, because if you're playing it right, you got that rhythm.

OL: You were telling me earlier that you're family has a very mixed background, tell us a little bit about your family background.

RC: Well my mother's side of the family, they're mostly from the West Indies, Antigua – No, sorry, correction. It's my father's side of the family that's from the West Indies, and from Antigua, and places like that. And on my mother's side, we're mostly East

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

Indian, where there's a big mixture, like it's a lot family from North Carolina, you know, even a little bit of France, because like my mother has a French last name. So we realized we even have a little bit of that in there, it's a real big mixture on my mother's side.

OL: So, you were the only kid in the household growing, it was you and your grandmother - -

RC: and my moms.

OL: - - But you had a connection to your father, you saw him?

RC: Yes.

OL: What was it like beyond your apartment? You said you stay to yourself a lot, what was it like growing up in the 80s with what was going on in the street outside your apartment?

RC: It was, it was very interesting. Well, for me, it was very interesting because every time I went outside everyone knew who I was because they knew who my mother was, they knew who my father was, so walking around, soon as I go outside I'm hearing, 'What up little Rockin' Rob?' [Laughter] And then also on top of that, my father played basketball, and if I go to the park, I shoot around, 'Yo, you going to be able to jump like your pops? You going to be able to ball like your pops? Your pops he was dunking like 18 years old.' [Laughter] I was always, almost like you could say, the spotlight a little bit. In the beginning it bothered me, it bothered me, because I used to be like every time I'd go outside, I got to be flashy, I felt like I had to do these types of things, but really I didn't. So, going outside, chilling with some of the kids around the neighborhood and stuff, I was always cool with every one, I never had no problems with no one.

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

MN: Now those years, the late 80s and 90s, was a tough time in a lot of places with crack, did that affect your particular development, or was - -

RC: I seen a lot of it. I definitely saw a lot of it. There was a park down across the street, and when the lights was off, basically when it's dark and all you see is the lit crack pipes all through the park. I've always been around it, I always knew about. But, you know, it is what it is.

MN: - - But you didn't feel unsafe?

RC: No.

MN: You didn't feel like you had to dodge bullets?

RC: No. I mean, a lot of shooting was happening too, but [Interruption] Yea, shooting always happened. But a lot of times, with me, when the shooting happened, I ended up upstairs. So it's almost like God must have been like 'You know what Rob, it's time for you to go upstairs,' and as soon as I go upstairs you hear 'pop, pop, pop.'

OL: So you felt like there was a divine intervention that warned you?

RC: Yes, to this day, I still feel that. I've been through a lot of situations where if I didn't go this way, something probably would have happened to me, or someone around me, something would have happened. So it like that definitely pays a toll.

MN: So what was school like for you? Did you enjoy school?

RC: [Sigh] School. Alright, me with school, I liked it, the only reason why I did like it was because schools always have information and stuff like that. Me, I went to a Catholic school, I went to Immaculate Conception up on 3rd Avenue and 149th Street and ever since 1st grade I was in there all the way up to 8th grade and the thing with me when

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

it came down to school was I was always the kid that got bored quick. I wasn't the talkative one, I was always the one that was just laid back and didn't really participate that much. You could basically say I looked like the type of kid that didn't want to be there. But school was cool, it was cool because I had friends there. That was one of the things that I looked forward to in school and I didn't really like my teachers that well because a lot of times, I also played basketball, I was on the basketball team, so I kind of felt like certain teachers – it was a lot of teachers that helped me and then of course you got some of them other teachers that's kind of like, you kind of feel like they're coming at you, instead of me trying to help you, they trying to come at you or trying to just eliminate you for something or any given reason it is. It was like, that was my battle, my battle was dealing with people that I felt like didn't like me. It was like, that's funny that you asked me that because I haven't sat down and thought about that in a *long* time, like how I felt about school. I wish I was able to go back, and I would tell anybody that, you know, please get your school stuff together because - -

MN: So you left before you got your high school diploma?

RC: - - Yes, when I was in junior high school, I didn't even get my high school diploma, because I was just going through a whole bunch of other stuff and then when I got to high school I went to a public school.

MN: Which public school?

RC: Harry S. Truman - -

MN: Oh God.

RC: - - in Co-Op City. [Laughter] So it was like there, see there, it was different for me, because still dealing with people, still going through the whole teachers in stuff, but see

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

I'm very much with if you want to teach me, teach me, but if you realize I'm having a problem, I'm not asking that you just hold my hand, but don't just ex me out either. So a lot of time I went through that as well. But when I came to high school, when it came down to my music thing, I was the kid always in the lunch room, taking a can and just banging on the table, making beats and stuff. My first day of school I went to lunch, and at this time I had just made like to friends, and we don't know no one else, so we just sitting in the lunch room, and I'm like [making beat on the table] and then out of no where I start just like [beats on the table] and my friends was just like, 'wow, yo man you know this song?' And I'm like, 'yea I think I know the beat.' Then before you know it, it got the point where the whole entire lunchroom started [crosstalk]. People was like, 'who is that dark skinned kid that's always making beats and stuff?' Then, of course, people started having rapping battles, so whenever there was a rapping battle, I had to be there to do the beat, so I became this, you could say, a jukebox. People would be like, 'yo man, play that beat, play that beat.' I would just do my thing and people would just be rhyming. Like a friend of mine, Skittles, that was another friend of mine that was rhyming a lot, it was very interesting.

OL: So music became a part of identity, you were known for that, people sought after you, you were always a part of something because of the music?

RC: Yes.

MN: Was there any way that the school tried to take what you did and turn it into something that was a part of school activities?

RC: The school didn't really know that much about. It was like the only people that knew about it was the people that was controlling the lunchroom at that time, like Mr.

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

King. There was this guy, Mr. King, he used to always be the one, he would check your I.D. card to make sure you were supposed to be in there at this period. It used to get to a point where I would have people so hyped that they're dancing on the tables, they're singing, they're literally chanting the songs, and he would look at it, and he would be cool with it, but he knows that it was school. So he would come to me and be like. 'Rob, if you don't stop I'm going to have to kick you out,' you know. And then I see everyone and I'd be like 'shut-up, shut-up, shut-up, everyone just sit down a just listen, just listen to these two rhymes.' That was the only thing that school was involved in, it was just like, I enjoy what you're doing but just don't let it get too overwhelming to the point we can't even control the kids. I totally understood that.

OL: Was there any music education in your school? Did you have music classes?

RC: Yes there was and that was another funny thing too, I always wanted a music class, I always wanted to learn the drums, sax, everything like that. Every time I'd get to the music class, I always had to be reading about it, I always had to be learning about notes and stuff, so it was like I didn't want to do that stuff, but now that I think back, I wish I'd been able to really stick to it, because once you know how to read notes, once you understand where music came from, what it went through and all that stuff, it really broadens you out, and opens you up, to a *whole* other level of music, a whole other level of thinking of music, and feeling music. So, the music classes that I had, was good.

OL: But, they didn't really, you couldn't see how it was applicable at the time? You didn't have a teacher who could show you the connections?

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

MN: Now one of the things, and this is just my reaction, just in the way you express yourself, you seem like somebody who is a college graduate, in terms of your ability to express yourself, and your poise, your diction, the whole package.

RC: [Laugh]

MN: How come nobody grabbed you by the neck, and said God damn it, you are smart and talented. We're going to sit on you to make sure you do this?

RC: All my life, people have told me that. The same thing that I would tell everyone else, about anyone else that you'd probably feel the same way about, if that person's not, if it doesn't click to the person, it's not going to happen. So, I had to wait until I was 24 years old for me to really sit down and be like, damn, I should've really payed more attention, and really took school by the horns, and was like, you know what? I'm going to make you do whatever I want you to do. You are going to give me whatever I need, so I can move on with my life. I know that now, but back then you couldn't tell me that I'd be sitting here actually picking up a book this thick, and really wanting to know what's inside of it. That's where the way I am now, it's to the point I'm so hungry for knowledge, I'm so hungry for knowing the things that other people don't want to take the time to know, because it be the littlest things that will take us, who knows where? So now I'm on a journey of basically reconditioning myself, because in the beginning, yes, I did damage myself to the point where it really came down on paper. But now I'm basically going backwards, just to go back forward again.

MN: So people did try?

RC: Yes, parents, their friends, my friends, certain teachers, I mean every one, *everyone* was like you got so much potential. Because all I heard all my life was, 'you got so much

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

potential. You're not a negative kid, you're not a bad kid. What's up? What's going on?' But I was very much to myself, I was very quiet, I had certain problems in my childhood, that even to this day is still a little bit hard for me to talk about. But I'm gradually coming out of it. Like I was really quiet, like right now I'm surprised I'm even talking this freely. If you'd have met me maybe when I was like 15, 16 years old, I would greet you, 'hi, how you doing?' Then I'd be quiet after that. Now, I'm very much like, 'hi, how you doing? Where you come from? How's your family?' It's like I'm very much more talkative now, I have no problem opening up to people, I have no problem taking in what people say, I'm learning.

OL: Getting around to the musical influences, who were you listening to when you were growing up, other than your father's work, who were you listening to?

RC: I was listening to a lot of MCs, because it got the point I looked at MCs being a speaker, you know, the way you use your words, the way to think your words. When you have a certain beat, how many ways you can flip your style in that one beat. Some of the rappers that have done that for me was, Rakim, - excuse me. Rakim, Nas, KRS One, my uncle for instance, my Uncle Tiny, my Uncle Barry. Wow, the list is so long. I've never had just one rapper that I listened to, and that was it. I listened to basically a big, *a big*, circle.

MN: Now, did you also follow the people who were making the beats, the guys behind the music like DJ Premier?

RC: Premier, no. I really started paying attention to the beats, like basically the producers, I was sitting there and I was listening to Premier, and this one producer, that he must just gave ... was Timbaland. you know, Swiss Beats, I was liking his stuff. But

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

mostly between Premier and Timbaland. But for some reason, when I heard Aaliyah on “One and a Million” I fell in love with the beat. I totally fell in love. And the fact that she was on the beat made me realize who *she* was. So it was like, that just pulled me back, I was like ‘wow.’ And that was one of the beats I used to play in the lunchroom, it was like if I played that beat, it was like I felt like it was mine, and it was Timbaland’s, but it was like so important to me. The way he’s flipping the beats, the way she sounds with it, it’s like one of those, if you played that anywhere people would stop and be like, what is that song? I love songs like that, I love people that want to make music to the point that it stops you, maybe if it’s just for a second, it stops you and you go, what was that? Who was that?

MN: One of the things I’m curious about is, there’s the kind of DJing you do at a party, you know, or to move a crowd, and then there’s what you do in the studio? When did you first start working in the studio?

RC: Well my first time working in the studio when I got my name DJ Flawless. I got that from my cousin Mark, his name is Crazy One - -

OL: Crazy one?

RC: - - Crazy one. He’s another who MCed, he break danced, he rides motorcycles. He used to ride motorcycles for Ruff Ryders at one point. He’s a producer. I mean, that man, literally, he’s also a big toll in what happened to me as far as when it came down to my music. He brought, not to get off the subject - -

MN: No, no this is fine.

RC: - - he brought me to the level of turning the turntables sideways. They have this thing where you had the turn tables standing, just like a regular turn table, and that’s the

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

way my pops would DJ, so I followed right behind him, going back and forth, so when I was younger I had to reach. One day my cousin comes over and he goes – and he seems *mad* excited. He goes, ‘yo man, I want to show you something new, can I take your turn tables out your coffin and turn them sideways?’ I was just sitting there looking at him like, what is he going to do with this? My pops was even shocked, he never saw it done. It was like, alright cool. Did it, put the mixer up, make sure it was off, and automatically I realized - -

OL: You could reach them now. You could get at them better.

RC: - - Yes. It was like, I was like, ‘wow.’ Alright they’re closer, so automatically I said I can be faster. It just clicked. He pulls out Run DMC “Peter Piper” and there’s a part in that song, that it goes that it has a lot of hard kicks in and it goes ‘Not bad meaning bad but bad meaning good.’ That part, he flipped, like he was just doubling up the sounds he was like [emulating the sound of the scratching]. So, I’m watching this, and I’m used to seeing the regularly cutting you know [emulating slower cutting technique] that’s it. I didn’t see no one going back and forth so fast, so I’m like, I’m really blown away. Me and my father are just gone, we’re like, really? It’s like that.? So he stops and does some helicopter thing he’s like [emulates helicopter sound] and then he stopped and was like, ‘there it is,’ and then he stopped the record. That just, hooked me, that right there I was like I want to learn how to do that. But, back to the story, how I was in the studio, my Cousin Mark, he was making a track, and he wanted me to do some scratches for him. So we go to this guys studio, and everything, and my cousin, he’s a character, he’s the type of person that if he knows if he has a secret weapon, he’ll use the secret weapon on

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

you. So he's knows the friend that had the studio was a DJ, so he's in there and he's like, 'Yo my little young cousin right here will bust your behind in some turntables.'

OL: [Laugh]

RC: And he said it just like that. So I'm sitting there, like Mark what are you doing man? I don't. So the dude looked and he was just like, and he gave me look. And my cousin was a like, 'I'm serious, this little dude here will bust your behind. Pick any record that you want.' So dude, looked at me, I stood my ground, and I'm like, you know, yea what ever he says, right? So he brings out this James Brown record. It ended up being a record that I also used to cut, so he ended up doing his thing – he did his thing. Boom. Now I come on, going back and forth, so my cousin was like, 'that's too easy, make it harder.' So I was like alright, so I was like [Makes beat noises]. Then my cousin was like 'That's too easy, make it harder. Come on man, you playing with him right now.' So I was like, boom, boom, boom, boom, I'm getting faster. So basically, it was kind of like, to be real with you, I kind of blew it through and above the water. My cousin was like 'Alright, now let's get back to the studio.' My cousin, for what he did for me at that moment, he gave me that feeling of, don't be afraid when it's time for you to do you your thing, you do it, don't sit there and be like, oh no. Once you get put on the spot, it's either you're going to put up or shut up. I'm that type of person who's like, let's make it happen. Now I have no problem sitting there and saying, you know what, you think you're better than me? Let's go find out. That's just the way I roll now, it's like, I give every single DJ I'll give every MC credit, for what they do, but once it get to the skill level, of saying, is your skill better than mine? I'm that person that will put it to the test, I have no problem. [Laughter]

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

OL: So that's when they started you calling DJ Flawless?

RC: Yea, how I got the name Flawless, it was because, the way the guy wanted me to cut on the track, I was thinking if that if I hear the beat, I'll be able to cut to it. He didn't want to play no beat, he just told me to start scratching. So, I found that kind of weird, so I was like, 'yo, can you at least play the beat for me one more time?' He played the beat, so now I'm remembering the beat in my head, so I'm like okay if I can just get the tempo right, in my mind, without the beat and just keep the beat playing in my head, I'll be able to just vibe out in my head. So that's what I did. So every time we did a track and we kept doing it over, it would be a certain cut, because I didn't like feeling that he had. So my cuts didn't really come out the way I wanted it to, so I would sit there and go, 'yo, let me do it over.' Then they'd be like 'it's fine!' I'd be like, 'let me do it over. *I want to do it over.*' So they go, '*alright* man.' I do it again. They like, 'yo it's good, that's what's up.' *I want to do it again.* It's just a certain ear that I have for it, I'm like, *I want this to sound the way that I want it to sound.* So, it got to the point where, it was what it was, but then they was like, 'yo man, every time yo did it-it was good,' so dude goes, 'what's your DJ name?' I was like, 'I really don't have a DJ name.' So everyone was like 'we got to get you a name.' So everyone's just tossing names out. Someone would toss a name out, 'nah that ain't going to work. That's whack.' My Cousin Mark, he comes out of nowhere, and he's talking about the whole situation, and me constantly doing it over, and he was like 'yo man, it was flawless, it was fine.' And then I was like, 'flawless? It kind of works. I sat there and was like, 'that sounds kind of cool.'

[Laughter] And I didn't even really pay that much attention of what the word meant, I just knew flawless meant close to perfect, you know that whole perfect, clean cut,

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

everything. But now, I realize since the moment I took that name, and made it real official, he set the name on his track. And that track has a date and everything, so it's like the moment that happened, that's when DJ Flawless, was born. I just took it by storm after that, everywhere I went people would ask me, 'yo man, what's you're DJ name?' DJ Flawless. I'm just now getting to the point of being comfortable being called flawless. I sat there and looked at the dictionary and read the word, what the word means, and I was like wow, that's a lot a got in my bowl, to the point that when I ended up working at Scratch, I got a check one day, I was feeling good I was, you know, let me do something spontaneous, let me do something for me. I was like, you know I'm going to get me a tattoo, what am I going to get a tattoo of? Something that's *really* me. You know, I don't get something that when I look at I'm like, oh my god, I can't believe I got this. So I was like, you know what? I'm going to get my DJ name. So when I got a tatt, when the floor was on me, that's when they looked on me. Like wow. Your DJ name is DJ *Flawless*, that means, you know, you got to be on your game, you got to make sure that this skill is that much on point, so when people hear you name, if I should go up to you and say, 'hey my name is DJ Flawless.'

OL: You've got to bring it?

RC: Exactly. You hear the name you're going to be like? Flawless? Okay, you got to be on to something? You got to bring it to the point where like, if your name is flawless, you going to have to show me something, to the point that I go wow. That's what I worked on. I worked on the fact of I wanted my skill to be so strong, and so much on point that every time I play music, I wanted people to go wild. I really wanted people to go wild. I really wanted people start coming to me and saying, you know, I see why

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

people call you flawless. I see why you got the name. Once that started coming to me, I was like, I picked a good name. That was a good name for me because it gave me plateau, that I have to reach up to.

OL: So, you mentioned before that the song that they chose was a James Brown song, and you had already been scratching on that song? How did you- so you were listening to people like Timbaland and Aaliyah, but also some older artists like James Brown. Did you come to that on your own or?

RC: Oh, that was also from my parents and my family, because they were always into cutting. Because my pops, he's mostly a pioneer when it comes down to DJing, so it was like, he cut a lot of like the Pussy Footers, he cut a lot of, of old school songs. But the thing with old school there was a part called the break beat, and basically the break beat is a certain, probably a couple of seconds, of a certain part that just basically you considered funky. You know, it's just a beat - -

MN: Turn it loose .

RC: - - that whole thing. So, it's like, once you take that part, you just keep looping. And by me listening to him do it, I was like - -

MN: How do you- what do you mean by looping it? Describe what that is.

RC: Well basically, like say I have to turn tables. Now, left, right, and a mixer in the middle. So like, let's just say, I was cutting James Brown. You know how in the beginning, it's like 1-2-3-4. So I would just go, 1-2-3-4 [emulates scratch noise] 1-2-3-4 [emulates scratch noise] and then just keep going back and forth, basically looping it up. It was like, just by me listening to them do it, it introduced me to James Brown, it introduced me to like Chaka Kahn, when I used to cut certain songs from her and stuff

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

like that. But then see the thing that was funny, I only heard the break beat part. So like, when I was younger if you played the beginning of the same song, it took me a while to catch on to what it was, until that break beat came on, then I'm like, 'oh that's what that is!' So it was like, now, I'm older now, I'm sitting there listening to old songs, now I'm listening to it - -

MN: No but it's so interesting, because I was playing a Delfonics album, for one of my students, and all he could think is who sampled it? So he said, 'that's Ghostface!' You know I put on-

RC: - - See, that's how I used to be. But then it got to the point, my pops was like, 'all you know is about the songs that are sampled. What about where it originally came from?' So he used to take me in the basement and would play the song, and he would be like, 'you hear this part?' Then I'd be like, 'yea I know it!'

MN: Now where is your father's studio?

RC: It's at his grandmother's house- in his mother's house, in the basement.

MN: Is that up in the North Bronx?

RC: Yea, in Gun Hill Road. He really opened up my eyes to a lot of music, that I didn't know nothing about. Also, he broadened me out towards music from Europe, because it was at one point he traveled, he toured over there with a friend of his, his name is Chuck. He is also an MC and a producer. He flew my pops over there, and my pops came back with a good amount of records, and when he played them I was like, 'wow, where is that from?' He's like, 'yo that's from Europe, that's from Belgium, that's from Paris.'

MN: [Laughs]

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

RC: And we listening to these dudes. Don't know what they saying, but, the feeling is there. And it's like long as you got that feeling, and this stuff is kicking, I don't really care what you say. If you get me to the point I'm standing like this, and I can help to go like this [still, and then starts nodding head] you got something. That always did something for me. Now I'm even to a point I'm listening to African music, I'm listening to Arabic music, I'm listening to Japanese music, people in China, I'm listening to everything, *everything*. Because you can't listen to one thing and turn to that other thing and say that's not mine, that's not my language. That's not my race, so you know what, I'm not going to listen to it. If you do that, you've already shut yourself down from *so* much that's out there. *So much*.

OL: So you mention – you talk a lot about your dad's influence on you becoming a DJ, but you mention that mom was a DJ for a while too, what was her experience like? Do you think there's a place for women to do this kind of thing?

RC: Oh, definitely, definitely. I mean to be honest with you, a woman - this is just me, this is just my opinion- if I saw a woman do exactly what I do I'd be, my heart would hit the ground. It's like, I guess it's because in the past about how women have been treated, and how at times people look at women as being the weak one, and all that stuff. For a woman to actually do what you do, it's like you're going to take it like you're upset, or you're going to greet it on some like wow, that's what's up.

OL: So you'd be supportive you're saying?

RC: Yes.

OL: What was your mom's experience like? Was she really into it? Was she just doing it like here and there?

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

RC: See the thing about it was when she was DJing I wasn't born yet. So, a lot of times all I could get off was just stories of what she's telling me, what other people told me.

MN: Now what sort of work did she do when you were growing up?

RC: Wow, it was at one point, just to provide for me and her, she used to work in factories like putting lamps together. You know, she was very hard working. She really pulled a lot in, just for me to sit there and have the Nintendo, and have the video games at like 3 years old. Basically, she did not want to deprive me from nothing. Whatever was out there that was new, my mother was there - -

MN: Now, this is interesting, was this a sense, in part, to keep you safe? That you would have everything in your house, you wouldn't have to go out there with the crack dealers and the bullets flying.

RC: Yes see that's how my mother was. See my pops was more the type, like basically on the weekends when I was with my pops, my pops was the type, you know, 'go outside, enjoy outside, go outside.'

MN: But that's up in Gun Hill Road, it's a different world.

RC: Exactly. So it's like on Gun Hill Road, I felt like I was a visiting. Coming from my side of the tracks. It was like, I'm in the projects, yes there do be crimes, yes there do be drama, yes there do be killings, yes there do be shooting, and fights and that stuff. But, you know, I wasn't totally fully around it, but it was like, I knew that was there, my mom knew it was there. So it was like, her way of just having a peace of mind to herself, let me take care of my child, let me give my child these things, and he won't have to worry about going outside. While he's playing the game, I'm hearing gunshots outside, and I know where my child is.

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

MN: One of my son's good friends, who he played baseball with for many years, grew up in the Gowanus Houses and that was the situation. He had the latest Nintendo, the Sega, he had everything because, you know, they either wanted him in organized activity or in the apartment, they didn't want him between the projects or on benches.

RC: So you see the only time I actually went outside, was to play basketball, or go to school. Like during the week, I could not play no video games. So it was school - back home. There was no hanging outside, it was no - but b games, yea I could get up and my mom was like, 'okay it's probably 11 o'clock right now, you can chill out as long as you like, as long as them lights don't come on, them street lights, once them street lights come on you better be, at least a half and hour later, inside this house. You got until like at least another half an hour, whatever you doing, to get back upstairs.

OL: Did you always listen to her?

RC: Yes I did, and then of course, you know, now and then, it was, oh man I'm in a serious game right now, I'm winning like three games straight right now, I'm about to play another one. I can pull it off real quick, and then of course I go upstairs, she's just be looking at me like what happened now, I thought was supposed to be up here? I'd be like, 'Ma, I'm sorry, I'm sorry,' and then I'd go in my room and go to sleep.

OL: So it was never that you were getting yourself into trouble, you were just out playing a game our something?

RC: Yes, it was nothing like, you know -

[END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

RC: It was like this one time, when I was in junior high school probably like 7th grade, thinking I'm grown, I had my little cousin Tony with me, Tony Rashaw and he was like

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

my shadow. Like everywhere I went he went. Everything I did he did. And I used to always, when we came from school, I had to take him to his center, so his mother could pick him up from there. This one time me, dealing with the women, you know, dealing with the girls at school. They was going some place I really wanted to go, and I sat there – to this day I would kick myself in the forehead if I could – I told my little cousin to go to the center by himself, while I go with these females. He does it. I go, thinking I'm having the greatest time all that stuff. I come back and I walk past my school and I see some of my friends still around the school, this is like a good couple of hours later on, and my friends is like, 'yo, I just saw your mother and your father. They're looking for you.' I'm like oh here we go, I was like, I messed up big time. I know they found out. I'm not in the house. I realized I was out too late on a school day anyway. So when I got home – then it got the point where T-Bird, which is his father, my cousin's father, he was even at the house, so I felt even more bad. That's like, he's my Godfather, and I look up to him so much, so it felt like my whole life just flashed before my eyes and I just knew I was going to be tore down basically. I did, I did, but you know, that was a moment that I really wished I had actually took him to center and took him home because who knows what could have happened to him that day.

MN: You know it's interesting thinking of – were there other kids you grew up with who weren't as fortunate as you in terms of having a family that cared, and a skill that people valued and who ended up with bad things happening?

RC: Yes there was a lot. I had a lot of friends that would tell me like, 'yo Rob you have a lot, why are you acting the way you're acting? You already seen how my lifestyle is, I don't have what you have. Stop, be smart, be responsible.' So I had friends like that,

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

that was going through totally do not have a father, totally their mother is on crack and the father's not around, go home to situations where they see their parents fight, like really throwing bows at each other's face, seeing they mother getting beat up, and bleeding and stuff. I had a lot of friends like that. Even to some points where I actually witnessed some situations that they was in and stuff. That also kept me on a path as well. It's like if you always think that you always had it bad, it's always someone that had it worse. So that taught me a lesson all through my life.

OL: So, even though your dad wasn't in the house with me, do you think your were unusual in the sense that you had a close relationship with your father?

RC: The main reason why I had a close relationship with him was because of my mother. My mother wasn't the type of mother to down talk him. Yes, she was angry. Yes, she was upset. But, she never came to me and was like, 'your father's a dead beat.' She never put down his name and that's something that stayed in me. So it's like if I did hear about my father, it was, 'he's a hard working man, he's working to put clothes on your back, food in your stomach, and he's taking care of you. You might not see him that much, but he do love you, he cares about you, he even cares about me, even if though he's not with me.' Those are the things that used to be constantly rotating in my mind. But yet, by you being a little kid, it's like when you see in your mother's face, you always be like, yes your saying all these good things to me, but why do you look sad? So it was like regardless of all the things that was happening, when it came down to me, she did her job, for him and for herself. Then when my pops came around, I would have a good weekend with my father. He was the one that would take me to City Island, he would take me to Six Flags, he would take me to Naples and Yonkers, so I could play a

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

whole bunch of video games and stuff like that. That was the adventure part for me, on like every weekend. I remember at one point my pops used to have red Trans Am, and I lived on the 15th floor and I remember looking down and like every single red car that I saw, it didn't even have to be a Trans Am, as long as I saw that bright red I was like my pops is coming. I would throw on my sneakers and stuff and I would be waiting at the door, and then no one was at the door I would be like okay fine. But then another red car I'd be like oh it's him. I was very much, I was always excited to see him, and when he did show up it was like alright I'm going to Gun Hill now. I'm going to play in the backyard I'm going to ride my bike, you know, and be around houses and see trees, you can actually see a lot of trees and stuff like that. Gun Hill for me, as I said before, it was like a Disney Land for me. I had my other cousin up there Rob Rob. The same way my cousin Tony for me was, on my mothers side, that's what Rob Rob was when I was at my father's house. He was like my one road dog, everywhere I went he went. Everywhere he went I was there. When we played basketball people had no idea that me and him was cousins because his mother is black and his father is Spanish, but he looks more Spanish then he does black. So when we go to the park, you know, totally different colors. So people would sit there and probably try to say some things to him. I would just turn it up, like yo don't even think about it. People would be like well what is he to you? That's my *blood*. Then people would be like oh okay, I'll leave.

OL: Well I wanted to also ask you some questions about how you feel, or if you feel, hip-hop has changed since you were growing up? Because you have a unique perspective, you've heard the stories that your dad told, when he was growing up in the

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

60s and 70s. Then you have your experience of growing up in the 80s in the Bronx, and now being an artist today, how do you think the music has changed?

RC: It changed to the point where people realized that with hip-hop comes a whole lot of stuff, basically financial. A lot of times people see this is something like, 'what? You mean to tell me, if I just say some things on top of a beat, I can get this amount of money?' It can be people that don't have love for it. It can be people that don't have that full, you know, *I love this*. You got some people that do it just for money. A lot of times, that's what's being played right now. You got a lot of people that's not taking the love, they take the love and just turn it into money. You know, you can't do that.

OL: That seems your experience because for you it was part of your family, everyone in your family was involved, and then it was also like your savior, it was something that you had an emotional attachment to. So for you it's very personal.

RC: Yes. And the thing that's wild, there's like so many other people that's just like that. So when you know – that's almost like examples like Mos Def. I feel like Mos Def was someone that has that love, that has that passion, but yet, he's not being played on the radio. You feel me? You got Kweli, when you hear him, when you understand the music that he's like, you know what that's a beat for me. You can tell the people that just has it, but they're *not* being played on the radio. That's why I'm happy for Kanye West, you know, Kanye West he's sitting there saying, 'yes, you need me. You need me in this industry. Because if I wasn't here, there would be no good music.' That's why I like Pharrell. Pharrell is the type of person, he understands music. At one point he used to play the drums, and he knows all sorts of other instruments. It's just that now, you got people that want to take this name gangster rap [makes quotation marks with his fingers].

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

I put that like this [quotation marks with hand] because I don't know what a gangster rapper is. [Laughter] To be honest with you, it's like, okay, you're just telling me, that you'd shoot me, you're telling me that you have a whole bunch of females, you're telling me that you have all this bling bling, you have all the cars. But you're not telling me about stuff you really need to know. You're not telling me the government, you're not telling me about real problems, you're not telling me about your skills. Tell me how nice you are. It's like people think now, in these videos, that you just have to keep showing all this bling blingy stuff. I admire that, I wish I had my pockets like that, that I could sit there and buy some nice jewelry. But I'm not going to sit there and just talk about that, and that's it, there's a whole lot to talk about, and that's what made it better for the people now because the fact that people are not talking about it, now should be the time to talk about it.

OL: So when your dad was introducing to people like James Brown, did he talk about the political associations that went along with James Brown?

RC: That, no he didn't. That's what TV did for me. I was a kid, I was raised by TV.

TV showed me what was going on in the world. It was like, when I watched the biography of James Brown I was like, wow. Like the dude, that I've been dancing to and stuff, that's what he went through? You know, Ray Charles –

MN: So you turned television, into like your school?

RC: Yes. Prime example, I used to sit there and watch channel 13, when they used to have spelling stuff on TV, because it was like everything else is going on, I got TV. Yes, I watched my cartoons, but then it got to the point that something would just catch me, and then I'm like oh really? You know I knew about Animal Planet, but before back

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

then, it was on channel 13, that's where you got most. Before I got cable, all I watched was channel 13, because it gave me animals, it gave me National Geographic. I knew about Africa, I knew about what was going on in Europe, I knew about slavery. That was another thing, it was like, all of the other races that would do things. Like Egypt and Greece and stuff like that. That was something for me to understand what else is everyone going through. Besides what I'm going through, I'm sitting here in a house, with a bed, with TV, with electricity, but yet I'm watching other people living in shacks, and they got kids and they got they own life styles. So it was like it took me out of where I was at and put me someplace else that I was like, wow.

OL: So, other than going up to Gun Hill to see your dad, when you were growing up did you leave the Bronx? Did you ever go down to Manhattan?

RC: Yea, Manhattan I went to a lot. I did mostly like Harlem, I chilled a little bit in Harlem. But, it got the point I found out about the Village, down in lower Manhattan. And I would tell anybody, that is somewhere, when you go down there – like basically if you go all the way down to Union Square as soon as you come up from underground and you go outside you feel an open vibe. You don't feel tense. You don't feel like there's danger. You just feel like –

MN: It was that way when I was growing up.

OL: Me too. Yea.

MN: You know, I'm from Brooklyn, you get down there, and you know, that was where it was happening.

RC: Yea, you know. So it was like, when I would walk out there, I would turn to my left I see people selling little things, you know, peace signs, you know I see all this, right here

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

on the side of the street. Doing their thing. People would just stop and actually appreciate what they're doing. So it was like, once that vibe came to me, it was like you know what, I went down to the Village almost every day. It was like it got to the point, I would wake up probably like 10 in the morning and if I didn't have nothing to do for the day, I would get me a book, get on the train, hop right on the 6 train, go all the way down to Union Square, go up to like maybe a park, you know, Washington Square Park – that's another park where there's nothing but artists, there's nothing but musicians, that's just sitting there playing music *freely*. *Freely*. It's like you will see a person playing the sax, playing the electric guitar and a person playing the bongos and they're just vibing out, and they don't know each other at all. You would be sitting there vibing out, doing something, and then all of a sudden you just hear someone across the park, and it's almost like they're just talking to you. That music that just captures you, and then you get up and you're like, I want to vibe with him. I've seen it, people will get up and are like, 'hey man can I play with you? Can I vibe with you?' They're like, 'sure come on.' You don't get love like that, a lot of places. Especially New York. A lot of times in New York, people are very to themselves, people are not trying to open up and say, 'you know what? Cool no problem.' If you feel a person, you could almost kind of feel when they're trying not to give you no heart. And once you feel that it's like, come on. That's basically what I got from the Village, because I realized I don't have to be always having a grill on my face, I don't have to always be looking mean on my face when I'm walking down the street. I can just sit there and walk past someone – like if I saw you, I'd be like, 'hey man, how you doing?' Like if I could just tell you're having a good day, 'alright man,' and the person to the left, 'be safe.' You know, say it to you too. And just go on

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

with your journey. It's like, why people can't just keep getting into that routine? That's just something that's in my mind that just blows me, that I just don't understand.

OL: So, tell us about right now, where you're at, what you're doing? Where are you living now?

RC: Well, right now I'm living with my mother. Because at one point, dealing with the fact that I'm growing up, she's always going to be a mother, we go like this [hits fists together] So at one point I was like mom, 'I love you. But we're better off apart.' Now I'm working at going back home, you know, putting my music there. Because I always played music when I went to my father's house. So now I'm thinking, you know what, this is where I'm rooted, at my mother's house, this is where I got all my music knowledge from, let me take my music from some place else, and put it there too. So basically, that's what I'm doing now, so it's going to be a lot of days of me, in the room just like an artist gone crazy.

MN: One of the things I want to do is, once you start putting CDs, I'm going to send it to friends of mine in Europe. You know, I have friends in Germany and Italy, you know, and get your stuff around. Because once you start creating, there's going to be some opportunities.

RC: I should have been started doing CDs a *long* time ago. But, I felt like it was too much competition. And the only reason why I felt like that was because I saw the all, it was *a lot* of DJs that just popped up out of nowhere. How is anybody going to really listen to me? There are so many DJs, we have the Sinbad, we have the Sight for Sound, we have the Latin Flex and all that, they're going to listen to me?

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

OL: Do you have a community of DJs that you're friends with now? Like I saw a bunch of people on your MySpace page.

RC: No. See now, I ended up -- see this is where Scratch Academy came in. That was the first place that I actually said, 'this is who Flawless is.' This is when I said, 'I am DJ Flawless.'

OL: So tell us what Scratch Academy is.

RC: Scratch Academy is a DJ school that teaches you how to DJ. Basically, they teach you the tools that you need to pursue yourself your own DJ career. And they also teach you how to produce beats and all that stuff. My play in it was, there was one night I was with my friend Delron, Delronimous, we were just chilling out in the Village. We were walking down the street, and it's night time, so almost all the lights was on, and I looked up, I was on 10th Street and 6th Avenue, I looked up and I saw this logo, it's inside this logo inside this window and the light was on, and it said Scratch with like a logo of a person that looked like they were doing a DJ stance. I was like, 'what is that?' My boy was like, 'why don't we go find out?' So we go up there, I looked at the thing it said second floor, I'm like alright yea. We go, as soon as I walk in there I hear music, I just hear a whole lot of noise. I'm like, wow this is actually an official -- okay they DJing up in here. I go in, and automatically they was like, 'hi. How you doing?' But all I saw was just all these turntables in a big circle I was just like, 'wow, what is this place?' Dude was like, 'yo. It's a DJ school.' And then they asked me did I want to be a student. Like, was I planning on studying here? And I was like, 'no, I'm already a DJ.' Then they was like, 'oh, well if you'd like to be a teachers assistant, a T.A., you know there's a

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

card, come down on a Saturday.’ I leave from the place – and then also at the time the there was also this DJ his name was DJ I Emerge.

OL: I merge?

RC: I *Emerge*. And you know, he was doing a lot of DJ competitions and stuff like that, so he was working there, so he was like their spotlight, their spotlight DJ at the time. So, I left the place. Two years went down the line, I forgot about the place, but I still had the card. Like I guess that day I must have just thrown it in my drawer and forgot about it.

Two years go down the line, I’m cleaning up the basement and stuff, and my pops stumbles over the card, at this time, I’d broken up with the ex girlfriend of the time. It was like my first love, so it was like I went through the whole, you know, being in the dark, not eating, all that whole stuff, didn’t have no job, wasn’t going nowhere. My pops finds the card and goes, ‘okay,’ calls them up without me even knowing. He ended up telling them I have a person that would be good for this job. Do you have jobs open for this place? They said, ‘yes. He can be a T.A. he won’t be paid yet but we will try to work into that.’ The next morning, my pops wakes me up get your cartridges, yet your needles and get two records, we’re going somewhere. I’m like, okay? So I get up, get ready, I go get my stuff and he – so now we’re walking in the same area and I’m like why does this seem so familiar? You know I’m like why does this seem so familiar? And at the time my pops had forgot what the address was so we just walking down, he’s looking around, and I’m like, ‘Pop, where we going?’ He’s like, ‘don’t worry about it.’ Like why are we walking around. I’m like I’ve been here before, I’ve been here before. As soon as I saw the door I’m like this is where he’s talking me? He’s taking me back to the same place that I went two years ago? We go upstairs, people have changed, there’s new

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

workers there, the dude I Emerge, he's not there no more. So, my pops was mostly doing the talking for me, he was like, 'yo, I got my son right here. He's not working right now. Can you please,' well not please but, 'do you have something open for him?' said, 'if he come down on a Saturday he can help out the teacher that's basically teaching the students' I come down that weekend, I come down on a Saturday. You know, it was a good vibe. That's how I met a friend of mine, J Smoke, he's a DJ, he's from the Allies, they was like a big DJ battle group. I met him. I met another friend of mine DJ Excess. I met another friend of mine Mr. Sinister, he was with the DJ group called the X Men, and they changed their name to the Executioners, and they was mostly the DJs from New York, like that was *that* DJ group, and he was down with them. I met him, and you know these were people that I'd watched on tapes, of them in competition, so I'm like wait a minute, I'm sitting in the same room with these dudes? I was shocked. So they didn't hear me that day, I helped. And then I did one more weekend, that was it. Then the third weekend that I did, they were saying that they had this thing called Scratch Session, and the main thing about Scratch Session was anybody was able to come up, hop on the set, and then just vibe out. So it was like you'd play the beat, it's just like the way people would rhyme, when they would have a rhyming session, they would have a scratch session. So like every 8 bars, you would scratch for 8 bars, you know, and then once your 8 bars is up, the next person would go. It would just go around in a circle. A friend of mine that works there, his name is Corey, his name is DJ Rampage. He told me, 'yo Rob, you need to come to the scratch sessions because mad heads mad popular cats are going in their and vibing out and DJing.' So I was like alright cool, I went in there so now this is my first time vibing with other DJs and stuff, so I walk in the room,

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

everyone's DJing, everyone's trying to find out who I am, I stood there and started up. DJs are going on, and then it came to me. So the other person I was standing next to, it was almost like you know where you have moments where you almost have like tones? So you have like a low tone, but then all of a sudden you hit like a high tone, so it's like it stands out more. What he did – basically my energy went over his, so everyone just like turned and was like, 'wow. Yo that's what's up.' Then everyone was like, 'good stuff,' and I was like okay, 'I like this.' So then I just started trying stuff, and then before you know people was like, 'yo man, what's your name?' 'Um my name is Flawless blah blah blah.' And then the next following weekend I didn't go. I didn't even go to Scratch. During that week of like maybe like a Tuesday or Wednesday they ended up calling my house and they were like, 'we didn't see you coming in last Saturday. What happened?' Oh I was busy. They said, 'how would you like to be on the payroll?' I said, 'that would be great. I'll come through.' Right after that I started working on equipment for them. So I used to do a lot of set up equipment. Like if they had an event here at like Fordham University, you would see me come out a cab with a coffin, two big JBL speakers, with stands, and a bag of wires and I was the dude plugging up. But yet, I'm a DJ. But, it was good money, I had no problem, I ended up being in situations where I was like, 'wow, I'm hooking up here?' It plugged me into a lot of backstage stuff, so once that happened I wanted to start DJing because I was like wait a minute. Like it got to the point people knew me as one of the best DJs in Scratch, you know, and like to the point where people used to call up, 'is Flawless going to be in today?' You know, 'if Flawless is there please tell him don't leave yet, I'm coming down right now.' I started bringing people in, and but for some reason – I'll put it to you like this, they wanted me to do a demo for them

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

and I didn't do the demo. So it's kind of like, if you don't do the demo, we can't put you on gigs. Understandable, but yet still in my mind I'm like, you already know what I can do, so why don't you, come on? I'm one of the best DJs you have, but yet you putting students on gigs before me, and these are people that I teach. I kind of feel like it was a big slap in the face. So it got the point I started looked at the place on the business level, on the business tip, I looked at a totally other way. It came down, but still the DJs that worked there, and maybe even some of the people that did the business. Like a friend of mine, Mike, he works there, him, I was cool with, everyone else I was very like – I would greet you, 'hi. How you doing?' But I won't sit there and have a long conversation with you, but all of the DJs that worked there, the teachers would be like, why are you not teaching here yet? I was literally showing some of the teachers, I'm not going to say no names, but I was even showing some of the teachers some things that I did. There was just a pair off; it was like this is how us DJs taught. It was like, if you wanted to learn a certain way, all you had to do was come up to me and ask me, 'yo, how do you do that?' I had no problem showing you. So we had a very good bond. So the same people that was teaching was saying, 'why they not giving you the opportunity to be a teacher here? At least at one on one.' You know, so it got to the point, some other stuff came up with me at the place and low and behold they let me go. Now the thing that happened is they let me go for a year and some change, I heard through the grapevine and then I actually heard from the actual person Rob Pricipy that when I left, something left with it. They said there was a lot of people calling, it was a good amount of people calling asking about me and stuff like that, all they had to tell him, 'he don't work here no more.' Then he even said people that used to come in a lot, didn't come in that much. It was like the

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

whole vibe changed. So one day I really missed the place, because I was like wow man this was a place that – and I knew a part of knew where I had messed up. But this was a place that I came out and was really doing me, I really felt like this is me right here, and I messed it up. So, I was like, if there's a chance for me to come back to it, I would greet it with open arms I would treat it the way it was supposed to be treated. One day, I typed up an e-mail to Robert Principy, saying you know, 'I really totally apologize for what happened.' This, that and the third. I really put my whole heart into it. I was basically like, yo if you just let me in through the doors, you will not be sorry. He hits me back saying, you know what, just off what you just told me you can come back. I was like thank you very much. But once I got there, I thought that I could at least be on a payroll, it's not like I'm a stranger or like they don't know what I'm about. So I ended up going further back then when I first got there. So it got to the point – and it' so wild because the people, when the people saw me walk through they was just like, 'where have you been dog?' The love was there, but on the business tip, they still did not want to give me nothing, so it got to the point with me I had to wake up and realize I have to leave it alone. For the talent that I have, I can't keep going after something that I want to be chased for. So until they decide to turn back around and be like, wait a minute, we had something here, that's only how I'm going to end up going back there. So like right now I'm basically fighting for self, because I'm not looking for that, they have to look for me.

OL: Do you have any other questions Mark?

MN: Where do you see yourself like going on into the next five years, in terms of your wish list for your music and your life generally?

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

RC: I want to be known to be one of the best DJs of New York. Like I really want that title. And it's not like I want to demand it, I don't want to demand that title. I want it to be earned. I want it to be to the point where when they think of New York, DJ Flawless name come up, maybe 50 Cent comes up, it's just certain key people, you know, I want to be one of those people. I want to be one of those people, like in New York there's this dude from the South Bronx, that's just –

MN: How do you see yourself getting there?

RC: Definitely being in the circle that I'm in. Right now the circle that I'm around is my father, DJ Rockin Rob, my pops friend Chuck City, DJ Chuck City. This other dude which is basically a legend, I mean all of them are legends. But this dude he made a path that literally the whole world follows. They call it the beat juggle, but when I met him, come to find out, that wasn't the original name of it, it was originally called just the funk. Basically what he created is on a record — if you look at a record for what it is, all it is, is just notes, everything is in notes, bars, and everything like that. So what he took was, I'm going to take a picked snare, and draw all my beat together. So instead of it going [makes beat noise] on both sides, it will go like [makes different beat]. Like he started mixing up the beats and making his own beat. He was the first one to actually do it and he did in competitions and people were just blown away of what was happening. Because at one point it was a lot of, how many tricks can you do, how fast you are, he came out of nowhere and was like you know what, I'm actually going to make music for ya'll with two probably either the same records, or two totally different records and mix them all together, and have you bobbing your head. And now, I know him. He's even showing me a path, he has taught me a lot as well, just in the amount of short time I've

Interviewee: Robert Caines Junior a.k.a. DJ Flawless

Interviewers: Oneka LaBennett and Mark Naison

been around him. He's also been cheated out of a lot of things. That was another person that I wanted you to have an interview with too, because when you hear his story.

MN: Is he also a Bronx person?

RC: No, originally he's from Harlem. He's also a part of hip-hop. He's definitely phenomenal.

MN: Now what about school? Do you see yourself going back?

RC: Yes, I do. Because without that piece of paper, it's going to be a lot of doors shut in front of my face, just if my music thing doesn't go the way I would like it to. So, it's like, my parents always are telling me, 'yes, you have your music, yes you're talented. But at least have this. At least have a GED or if you want go past that.' So I'm going to do that. I'm definitely going to do that. When? I'm not fully sure, but my path, that will also be a part of it.

MN: Okay, well thank you very much.

OL: Thank you.

RC: I mean, thank ya'll.